



Mississippi Department of Human Services

Press Release

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MDHS Investigators SNAP Welfare Fraud

(Greenville, Miss.) — Mississippians support helping struggling families put food on the table, but they also want to know their taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. The Mississippi Department of Human Services, Fraud Unit investigates those enrolled in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure the integrity of the nation's first line of defense against hunger.

State investigators from the MDHS Fraud Unit were in the Mississippi Delta July 23-24 to work with Bolivar and Washington County Sheriff's Departments and serve warrants for individuals accused of SNAP fraud.

Bolivar County Arrests: Susan Barnes, Tamara Harp, Tommie Ramiz, Christy Salley and Wanda Townsend.

Washington County Arrests: Jessica Beliew, Ethel Buie, Toya Goodman and Gail Stevenson.

SNAP and TANF fraud are usually the result of a client withholding income or household information that could deem them ineligible to receive benefits. Disqualification periods for SNAP fraud can range from 12 months for the first violation to permanent disqualification. Ineligibility is determined by state and federal mandates and can be ordered by the courts as part of sentencing.

MDHS Director of Fraud Investigations Kenneth Palmer said, "SNAP is designed to help low-income people make food purchases for their families. SNAP fraud, however, hurts everyone. Local stores where purchases would have been made suffer a loss of revenue and, of course, the family suffers because they are disqualified from a program which would have allowed for appropriate food purchases."

Small "mom and pop" grocers are usually the target by those trying to defraud a system in place to help those who are at risk of food insecurity, such as the elderly and children. Local residents can help spot fraud in their grocery stores.

If you suspect a store owner, store clerk or client is misusing SNAP benefits, call the Fraud hotline at 1-800-299-6905. SNAP fraud is a crime.

SNAP FACTS FOR State Fiscal Year 2014

Percentage of Population Receiving SNAP	SNAP Benefit Value
21.9% of Mississippians	More than \$938 million issued statewide
37.0% of Bolivar County residents	More than \$18.3 million issued in Bolivar County
42.3% of Washington County residents	More than \$32.8 million issued in Washington County

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